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TAGS: PGOV PREL PINS PTER PK

SUBJECT: PUNJAB CHIEF MINISTER ON SARGODHA DETAINEES, NRO, AND OTHER THINGS

CLASSIFIED BY: Bryan D. Hunt, A/Consul General, U.S. Consulate General Lahore, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif asked for more time as Pakistani authorities need to thoroughly investigate the Sargodha detainees. As the Supreme Court decides on the NRO, Shahbaz believes the next five weeks are critical and reiterated the PML-N's position that it wants to see the democratic system remain intact. He also explained that the military and not provincial authorities are responsible for the recent two incidents with ConGen Lahore vehicles. The recent terrorist attacks in Rawalpindi and Lahore have also conveyed to Shahbaz that the extremists are targeting all Pakistanis now, and not just security forces. End Summary.

FULL INVESTIGATION NEEDED

¶2. (C) In a December 15 meeting with A/CG Hunt, Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif emphasized the need for a thorough Pakistani investigation of the Sargodha detainees before considering to deport them or alternatively, to try the individuals in a Pakistani court. He asked for patience as Pakistani authorities fully determine whether or not these individuals had planned on carrying out any terrorist activities within Pakistan. Shahbaz also agreed to include the FBI in the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) that has been formed.

ON POLITICS: NEXT FIVE WEEKS CRITICAL

¶3. (C) Shahbaz said the next five weeks are critical as the Supreme Court deliberates the validity of the NRO. The next important question if the NRO is invalidated, he agreed, would be the fate of President Zardari. Regardless of what happens, Shahbaz reiterated the PML-N's position that it wants to see the current democratic system remain intact. Regarding the constitutional reform package, Shahbaz said he will believe it when he sees Parliament actually pass it. He seemed skeptical that it would happen anytime soon as there are still some outstanding issues to be resolved. Concerning the recent federal cabinet reshuffle, Shahbaz said it was not enough. Shahbaz reiterated his view that a thorough housecleaning of corrupt and incompetent cabinet ministers was key to building public credibility for the federal government.

STOPPING VEHICLES: IT'S THE MILITARY

¶4. (SBU) On the recent two incidents of stopping ConGen vehicles

in Lahore at the same military checkpoint, Shahbaz said he had looked into it but that it was the military and not provincial authorities that are involved. He suggested calling a meeting in Islamabad between the MFA, MOI, and MOD to resolve the issue.

VIEWS ON RECENT TERRORIST ATTACKS

¶ 15. (SBU) Shahbaz said that the extremists, with the recent attacks at the Rawalpindi mosque and Lahore Moon Market, have sent the message that they view all Pakistanis, not just the security forces, as "infidels." In a recent private meeting with Ulema leaders, he said he delivered a stern message to them that rather than blaming the U.S. and other forces for these attacks, they need to take personal responsibility in doing something about it.

COMMENT

¶ 16. (C) Shahbaz was clearly concerned with the increase on terrorist attacks against civilian targets in the Punjab and its impact on his government's reputation. He had no new ideas, however, as to how to move effectively against the organizations responsible - principally the shadowy Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. Shahbaz was concerned that such groups could easily exploit the upcoming Moharram processions during which tensions between rival Islamic sects are traditionally increased. On the political front, Shahbaz viewed the invalidation of the NRO and Zardari's dismissal as inevitable and necessary. He was concerned that the military establishment could move quickly to fill the political vacuum that such decisions would create if the PPP did not move quickly to reconcile political differences with the PML-N and to improve the government's public credibility. End Comment.

HUNT